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Unsettling discovery

Man says he found first ordnance in Surf City

By DONNA WEAVER

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SHIP BOTTOM — Using a metal detector he received as a Christmas gift, Darren Buscemi says he uncovered one of the first munitions found in Surf City.

At the end of January, Buscemi, with his daughter Ali and son David, were scanning the beach looking for items to add to their shore home collection. That's when Buscemi, who lives in Tabernacle but has a second home here, said he came across a rusty, 4½-inch item he could not identify.

"We took it back home, into the kitchen, and were banging on it with a butter knife and scraping it, ...#65533; Buscemi's wife, Kimberly, said.

Buscemi said he thought the fuse he found on the beach was a piece of a ship.

"I was kind of excited when I found it because years ago the sailing ships were put together with pins, ...#65533; Buscemi said. "When we got home, I took a brillo pad and a butter knife to it trying to get the barnacles off....#65533;

It wasn't until seven weeks later, when more munitions were discovered and the beaches in Surf City were closed, that Buscemi realized he had found something other than a ship pin.

"That's when I started reading and found out these things could blow your arm off, ...#65533; Buscemi said.

He said he called the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to pick up the ordnance but that they refused and directed him to the Ship Bottom Police Department.

The discovery of military munitions on the beaches last month forced the strands' closings and contributed to the delay of the beach-replenishment project's completion.

Five fuses for explosive projectiles, each more than 50 years old, were found in newly placed beach sand between 17th and 24th streets. A resident with a metal detector found the first fuse March 2. U.S. military bomb experts from Fort Dix then arrived to search the beach and found another fuse. Another local resident found two more fuses and a representative of contractor Weeks Marine Inc. found a fifth fuse Monday near 22nd Street, according to a statement from the Army Corps.

The Army Corps hired a contractor to conduct a geophysical investigation and electromagnetic survey of the beaches. To date, 79 pieces of ordnance have been found on the beaches in Surf City.

Fifth, 6th, 7th and 8th Streets were closed for scanning because the beach-replenishment project in Surf City tapered off in Ship Bottom, according to Khaalid Walls, a spokesman for the Army Corps. Due to the dredging of offshore sand during the Surf City beach project, munitions were pumped onto the beaches, according to Walls.

Buscemi said he is not happy with the signs at the end of 7th Street in Ship Bottom. The signs read that unexploded ordnance was found and the beaches will be closed until further notice. Buscemi says the signs are misleading because no munitions have been found there and he knows there is nothing out there.

After receiving his Christmas gift, Buscemi said he used the metal detector on five blocks of the Ship Bottom beaches and found nothing.

"I went up and down those beaches with my scanner for five blocks. Up and down for hours and I didn't find anything except for an old paintbrush and tin can,...#65533; Buscemi said.

Contractors are also using handheld metal detectors on the beaches to locate munitions along with a towed array magnetometer.

Last week, Walls said no munitions had been found on Ship Bottom beaches.

"There was no ordnance found on Ship Bottom beaches! There are no bombs out there and there will never be any bombs there. Make a sign that says that,...#65533; Buscemi said. "They probably got lazy, had a bunch of those signs and put one of them up instead of getting a new one made. Take those signs down or say what it is—it's a 200 yard buffer zone!...#65533;

On Thursday, Keith Watson, project manager for the Army Corps, said only one of the munitions was found not to contain explosives. None of the munitions have exploded so far, according to Watson.

Workers scanning the beach lost an entire work day Thursday due to bad weather and would use Saturday as a makeup day, Watson said.

"We feel this is an emergency response situation. They're motivated out there. They're working a 40- and 50-hour week and have said they'll work 60 hours,...#65533; Watson said. "We'll do whatever it takes to get the beaches ready for Memorial Day.

Buscemi said he is going to give the Corps until Friday to reopen the Ship Bottom beaches and then he will start calling them.

Buscemi watched from his rooftop deck Saturday as work continued on the Ship Bottom beaches near his home.

"They should get rid of that stupid orange fence so people can get up there. I can't go out and metal detect, and that's one of my hobbies and I have to actually walk further away from my property and do something that I enjoy doing,...#65533; Buscemi said.

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